



Newton Airport honors Earl Johnson's legacy

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A large crowd was on hand to honor Earl Johnson at a ribbon-cutting for the name change of the airport to Newton Municipal Airport - Earl Johnson Field. The change was approved by the Newton City Council at a June meeting and a plaque was placed at the airport for the man who did so much for the industry.

“What can I say except it is wonderful,” Johnson said.

Johnson created Johnson Aviation in October 1949. During his career in the airport fixed based operator business, he drove change and growth in general aviation. He was charged early on with growing and developing high standards for aviation in central Iowa, said Ethan Nasalroad, president of Johnson Aviation.

As an aircraft dealer, charter pilot, corporate pilot, airport manager, flight instructor and pilot examiner in the new and growing industry, he set an extremely high standard for safety and quality.

As an instructor, Johnson had a way of teaching a person without knowing them and had a reputation as a tough examiner who always gave a fair and thorough check ride, he said.

After he became an airport manager, he was always the one who was up early and out late to keep the runway open and clear of snow, often for him to use later on that day, Nasalroad said. He was instrumental in keeping the airport up-to-date with current technology and new safety standards as the field became more complex.

“Renaming the field was an idea that Jim Miller, Bill Smothers and I had kicked around for awhile. We thought, I wondering if Earl wouldn’t want it, and Jim said, it doesn’t matter we’re going to do it anyway. It’s just that fitting,” Nasalroad said.

Newton Mayor Mike Hansen told a story about taking his first ride in a multi-engine airplane that happened to be piloted by Johnson.

“We had just completed the maintenance on this aircraft, so he was taking it out for the check ride. We headed south over the Red Rock Reservoir area and unbeknownst to me, he puts the aircraft through a number of checks and balances. The first things I saw out there was both props turning and all of a sudden one prop starts slowing and stops. My heart immediately goes up into my throat and I think, ‘I know how to swim but I don’t know if I can swim across an entire lake.’ Pretty soon the prop came back on,” Hansen said.

“When Ethan and Bill called me earlier this year and told me about what they wanted to do in recognition of Earl’s work at the airport, I could think of person more deserving.”

Johnson has also been recognized in the Iowa Aviation Museum in Greenfield as a first generation fixed based operator and at the Spaulding Center for Transportation, Iowa Transportation Museum as a “hero of industry and technology.”

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